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SUBJECT: Public Diplomacy Best Practices: Focusing on Social Issues in Argentina

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**¶1. SUMMARY.** The United States is often criticized in Latin America for its lack of attention to social issues. To fight this perception during the last two years, the U.S. Embassy in Buenos Aires has led efforts to spotlight the major social issues in the city and country, bringing media attention to bear on heroic efforts to address problems which otherwise would have gone largely unnoticed. We share below some of our best "lessons learned" and most successful practices in our attempts to shed some light on these critical issues with the minimal aid resources we have available to us. END SUMMARY.

Highlighting the Battle Against  
Human and Drug Trafficking

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**¶2.** Human and drug trafficking are major problems in Argentina. Argentina is a source, transit, and destination country for men, women, and children trafficked for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation and forced labor. It has also now moved from being a largely drug-trade-transit country to a growing destination and drug-consuming society. While we have no formal development assistance program, Embassy Buenos Aires has found that we could be a major catalyst for enhanced public attention to these scourges by shedding light on and supporting the actions of courageous individuals and effective organizations combating them.

**¶3.** Embassy Buenos Aires has used Department calls for nominations for the International Women of Courage (IWOC) award to highlight the challenges Argentina faces in the areas of human and drug trafficking. For example, we converted the IWOC nomination and selection for anti-TIP activist Susana Trimarco de Veron into a campaign to spotlight her valiant efforts to rescue hundreds of trafficking victims in the search of her daughter, Marita, who is believed to have been kidnapped by human traffickers for the purposes of sexual exploitation. The Ambassador made a trip hundreds of miles from Buenos Aires to the Province of Tucuman to deliver remarks at the inauguration of Susana's Fundacion Maria de Los Angeles. The event was widely reported in the Argentine media. We encouraged other local media to focus on Trimarco's work. The positive attention that we showered on the activist captured the imagination of Argentina's cultural elites. Within a few months of our IWOC nomination for Susana, there was a soap opera on national television based on her story that soon became one of the top-rated programs in the country. It just won an Emmy, and the Foreign Minister told us up to 300 women and girls were freed as a result of this program showing in Argentina. To continue our efforts, for the International Day to Eliminate Violence Against Women on November 25, the Ambassador issued a statement praising the UN's decision to host the premiere of the play Mika (based on the story of Susana Trimarco de Veron's efforts on behalf of human rights) in New York. Earlier this year, CNN International broadcast a piece across the globe that emphasized Susana's relationship with the Embassy as key to the progress made in Argentina on the issue. Her story may never have become a cause celebre if we had not recognized and publicized her efforts.

¶4. Other inspiring citizens -- including those fighting the scourge of drug abuse in Argentina -- have received increased public recognition and support as a result of Embassy social outreach efforts. In 2008, for example, we nominated "Mothers Against Paco" founder Maria Rosa Gonzalez for the IWOC award. This woman from the slums has waged an uphill but brave battle to help young people -- including two of her own sons -- addicted to "paco," a cocaine-derivative similar to (and as devastatingly pernicious as) crack. Mothers Against Paco have helped to raise awareness that Argentina is now a destination country for narcotics, with ever-increasing domestic consumption and accompanying social ills. Acknowledging their efforts has helped help elevate the profile of Mothers Against Paco's cause, and has enhanced prospects for strengthened counter-narcotics cooperation from the Argentine government as new drug trafficking challenges, such as the up-tick in illegal ephedrine sales, emerge. One recent press editorial praised the Ambassador's visit to Maria Rosa Gonzalez's slum on the occasion of International Children's Day, and urged the Argentine government to pay greater attention to this emerging epidemic, while a weekly magazine this month highlighted her efforts and the harrowing experiences of her now drug-free son.

Taking Advantage of the Resources At hand

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¶5. The Mission's efforts to include other federal agencies in pursuing our public diplomacy agenda on the TIP issue have also been effective. For example, Post's Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Attaché Office brought down two ICE experts to address three conferences on trafficking in persons (TIP) in June. Over the three conferences, and working with federal and provincial officials, the ICE experts trained over 500 civil society participants and 500

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prosecutors, judges, and law enforcement officials at the federal, provincial, and Mercosur levels. In September 2007, an ICE official from Washington addressed the First National Trafficking in Persons Conference in Mar del Plata. The official addressed the importance of establishing TIP victim centers, and gave advice on how to get the centers up and running.

¶6. We have also looked for opportunities to engage DOD outreach efforts in order to shed light on and assist in addressing various social ills in Argentina. In October, for example, the Defense Attaché's Office conducted a Humanitarian Airlift Mission to deliver clothing, toys, and money to the small indigenous town of Santa Victoria del Este, in the extreme northeast region of Salta, a few miles from the Paraguay/Bolivia/Argentina border. The donations were made to an order of Catholic missionary nuns called the "Hermanas Franciscanas Misioneras de Santa Teresa del Este," who work day and night providing food and shelter to the numerous transient indigenous of the area. A special DOD flight brought a monetary donation to repair radio equipment the nuns use to broadcast public service announcements, educational information, and spiritual support to the surrounding population.

¶7. In another case, a visiting U.S. ship delivered an ambulance as a gift from a U.S. Rotary Club to a rural Argentina town. Also, through the innovative use of Southern Command's Humanitarian Assistance Minimal Cost Project Funds, the Embassy's Military Group has donated a refrigerator, beds, and linens for 2007 IWOC winner Susana Trimarco's victim shelter. In another case, the Military Group bought furnishings for a children's center focused on drug prevention directed by 2008 IWOC Nominee Maria Rosa Gonzalez in one of the capital's most dangerous districts.

Highlighting Good Works: NGOs and Corporate Social Responsibility

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¶8. Bringing together Argentine NGOs and other organizations to form ties that would lead to socially beneficial projects and public-private partnerships is another Mission priority. In April 2008, the Buenos Aires NGO Fair (reftel B) brought together 60-plus NGO representatives from across Argentina at the Ambassador's residence to meet with 40 representatives from embassies,

international and domestic companies, and foundations. Following two lively presentations on NGO development, the invitees participated in a two-hour Fair in which funding sources hosted booths, which were then visited by the NGOs. Both the NGOs and business community were extremely happy with the event. As a result of the event, one of our implementing partners, the Argentine International Cooperation Network (RACI), recognized the need for smaller NGOs to learn how to access international funding for their projects. In November, they published a manual for NGOs on how to apply for grants. Inspired by the success of the Embassy-sponsored fair, the U.S.-based Ashoka Foundation sponsored its own fair featuring socially conscious Argentine businesses in November.

¶19. Embassy Buenos Aires also visibly supports corporate social responsibility. U.S. companies are important contributors to the Argentine economy, with more than 500 U.S. firms active in the country. Embassy Buenos Aires has worked hard to highlight the positive CSR efforts U.S. companies have initiated to help support communities in order to demonstrate the value of our commercial ties and the positive impact U.S. firms have, nationally and locally.

¶10. The Ambassador's schedule regularly includes events to highlight good corporate citizenship, which we emphasize in our regular press releases, and which often garner extensive and positive media coverage. Events in which the Ambassador has participated include a visit to the Argentine Food Bank with primary Bank-supporter Kraft Foods; participation in a "shoe drop" for disadvantaged children with U.S.-based TomsShoes; a visit to a reading room in San Juan Province financed by Clorox; and the serving of Big Macs in support of Ronald McDonald House. To call more public attention to the good works of U.S. firms, the Embassy conducted its inaugural CSR Awards event in December 2007, in which the Ambassador honored the Embassy's five nominations for the Secretary of State's Award for Corporate Excellence (ACE). The event took place at the Ambassador's residence and was attended by numerous public and private officials, business contacts, and, of course, prominent members of the media. A second edition of this event is planned in December for the 2008 nominees.

#### Reaching out to Youth and the Disadvantaged

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¶11. The Mission's Community Action Program (CAP) is designed to get the Ambassador and other Mission personnel out into the community (schools, charitable institutions, community organizations), where they make donations (books, computers, other materials); interact with young people, community leaders and journalists; and project a different image than the one most people expect of American

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diplomats. In the last two years, the Ambassador has visited NGOs, public schools, and homeless shelters in many under-privileged areas of the city of Buenos Aires and the provinces, donating a total of approximately \$23,000 in books, computers, appliances and educational materials. Press releases are generated for visits when CAP recipients are amenable, and events have received wide radio, TV, and press coverage. In all cases, photos and stories about the CAP donations are prominently displayed on the Embassy website. Feedback from elites and slum dwellers alike has been very positive -- many have said they were impressed that we would even venture into these areas. One NGO, Por Decir, sent the Ambassador a letter thanking him for visiting their drug rehab center. In the letter, the NGO's leaders indicated that, as a result of this visit, they had received numerous phone calls from concerned citizens asking how they could help. The latest of our forays was in early December. The Embassy partnered with an Argentine Foundation to install a computer training center in a very tough Buenos Aires neighborhood in a cooperative center with a local NGO and a continuing education center.

¶12. Perhaps the Mission's most innovative program, our Music Outreach Program, has leveraged Argentine fascination with American popular music to promote good local causes. A Music Committee staffed by Embassy volunteers reaches out to the many U.S. pop, rock, jazz, and Latin acts that visit Buenos Aires with requests to join the Ambassador and other Mission staff in a community outreach

activity. The scale of the outreach activity varies from inviting underprivileged youth to attend a concert; meet-and-greets with the artists to benefit concerts; and even abbreviated concerts in soup kitchens or other social organizations. The activity ultimately depends on the comfort level of visiting performers and local concert promoters.

¶13. Highlights of our music outreach include:

-- a Cyndi Lauper concert in which the artist not only talked backstage with HIV-infected youth, but invited them onstage to dance and sing along to "Girls Just Wanna Have Fun";

-- a Black Eyed Peas concert at the Pepsi Music Festival where the band met with a group of young students (none of whom had ever been to a concert before) from Virreyes, a poor barrio in Greater Buenos Aires, and talked with them about building a good future for themselves;

-- a concert at a soup kitchen by country singer Brandon Pruitt, which introduced kids and parents to this type of music in an open and friendly manner;

-- a master class by world class violinist Joshua Bell held at the Ambassador's residence with members of the youth orchestra of Buenos Aires made up of underprivileged kids;

-- performances at a soup kitchen, drug rehabilitation clinic and the Ambassador's residence by Latin-fusion group QzoMatli, which inspired kids with music and the band members' own stories of overcoming hardship;

-- meetings between Grammy Award-winning band Toto, guitar hero Joe Santini, and alternative Black Rebel Motorcycle Club and young musicians in which band members answered their questions about becoming music professionals; and

-- a master class for more than 400 music students conducted by the talented banjo player Bela Fleck and electric bass player Victor Wooden, which wowed the kids with friendly and inspiring instruction.

Keeping the Focus on Social Issues

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¶14. Post will continue to use whatever public diplomacy tools we can find to expand our focus on and involvement in the critical Argentine social issues mentioned above. For example, we are significantly expanding our English-teaching program throughout the country, particularly to strong students who cannot otherwise afford to study the language. We will also continue to act as a conduit - spotlighting for the media worthwhile causes and heroic efforts to address the social ills the country faces. In this way, we will show a side of the United States with which many in Latin America are unfamiliar. In our view, this approach is an effective way to reduce anti-Americanism in the region despite the fact that we have very few financial resources to devote to our projects. It is also the kind of diplomacy that feels good to carry out - which is why we've managed to support most of these activities with Mission volunteers.

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